

Michael Richardson

TRAVEL, SURREALISM AND THE SCIENCE OF MANKIND

There is a mental geography that may find its explorers, but never its cartographers.

Annie Le Brun

The nature of the relationship between surrealism and anthropology has been a focus of recent anthropological debate.¹ This relation has not been considered at the level of methodology and the aim of this article is to consider surrealism in specific methodological relation with anthropology, particularly about how the idea of travel has been conceptualized.

¹ See in particular articles by James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, no. 23, 1981 [reprinted, with some modifications in his *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1988]; Jean Jamin, "L'Ethnographie mode d'emploi. De quelques rapports de l'ethnologie avec le malaise dans la civilisation", in J. Hainard & R. Kaehr (eds.) *Le Mal et la douleur*, Neuchâtel, Musée d'ethnographie, 1986; Frances M. Slaney, "Psychoanalysis and Cycles of 'Subversion' in Modern Art and Anthropology", *Dialectical Anthropology*, 14, 1989, pp. 213/234.

The Czechoslovak surrealist Vratislav Effenberger has seen anthropology as emerging in periods in which political and religious ideologies begin to decompose as a response to the need for fresh perspectives on human behaviour. For Effenberger, surrealism and anthropology are parallel responses to such a need, both of which seek to “establish new points of departure to bring together new perspectives on our consciousness of existence”.²

For their part, anthropologists have often used surrealism as a counterpoint to their own activities as anthropologists. Edmund Carpenter, announcing that his account is going to follow a different path than that usually encountered in anthropology, stated: “The notes that follow belong to the world of surrealism where events are experienced from within, not observed from without”.³ More specifically, Georges Balandier has drawn a direct relation with surrealism in defining his own aims in anthropology, which he states ought to have “a revelatory function [which] generates a return to oneself and a deviation by means of the Other. It enables the subjects to have better access to themselves and their roots; to allow their muted words by means of comparison... But this ethnology is also revelatory of those who practise it; it impels them to greater truthfulness by forcing them to take off the masks which are imposed on them by social conventions. [...] Ethnological knowledge of this kind is never neutral, but committed, and the task of expression is a necessity”.⁴

For surrealism, the idea of disinterested knowledge is anathema, as is anything institutionally controlled and defined. It is fundamentally different from the university discipline of anthropology which is forced within the constraints of the university system to offer inducements for career advancement not based upon the fact that the anthropologist must feel an inner necessity to do the research he wants to do. It is this fact, rather than anything specific to anthropological approaches to the world that brings surrealism into conflict with it.

² Effenberger, “Le Surréalisme et la civilisation contemporaine”, in *Change*, Paris, Seuil, 25, 1975, p. 117.

³ Edmund Carpenter, *Oh What A Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* London, Paladin, 1976, p. 67.

⁴ Georges Balandier, “‘Terre Humaine’ as a literary movement”, *Anthropology Today*, Vol 3, n. 1, 1987, p 1. The article was written for *Anthropology Today* and has never been published in French.

Surrealists thus escape the confines imposed by the institutionalization of a university discipline. But at the same time a professional discipline like anthropology provides surrealism with data and ideas which it is itself unable to gather due to lack of resources. As James Clifford has shown (although we would not necessarily agree with the conclusions he draws from this fact), surrealism and anthropology often respond to each other in ways which provide fertile avenues of exploration.

METHODOLOGY

In endeavouring to consider surrealism anthropologically the question of methodology arises. If one seeks to define the nature of surrealist activity, one comes across a series of negatives. It is not a literary or artistic movement, it is not a science; it is not an ideology, a party, or a secret society. Or rather, if it is any of these things, it is not reducible to any of them. It is a community, but a community that is so diffuse that it cannot be treated in terms of what its members actually do, since those activities are not confined to what its members do within the community (that is to say that no distinction is made between what they do within the community and what they do within the larger society of which they are part). It is a sensibility with no fixed attitudes as such. It is an attitude, a way of living, that is in process of continual change. Although it imposes no conditions on its members it remains bounded by a certain shared—if largely unspoken—perspective. As such it is apparent from a consideration of surrealist writings as a whole that methodological criteria are being respected. To try to draw these out, we can best look at some of the surrealist critical writings.

Jules Monnerot has defined the central dilemma of sociology in very clear terms. He points out that the sociologist who studies, for instance, revolution cannot do so adequately unless he actually becomes a revolutionary, but if he does indeed become a revolutionary then he would cease to be a sociologist. A methodological separation of roles is thus essential: “John’s anger and my understanding of John’s anger are distinct to the point of incommensurability.⁵ One can only make assumptions about

John's anger based upon one's own experience of anger. In this respect the human sciences establish a different relation *vis-à-vis* the object of study from that of the natural sciences, since the latter can never understand a phenomenon. It can only establish as great an explanatory framework as possible. To "understand", on the other hand, is a characteristic of the human sciences. Monnerot sees this as the central issue that Durkheim refused to face. In fact he claims that Durkheim is only of value when he breaks his own methodological rules: "Durkheim confounds the two orders of comprehension and explanation when, evoking the '*corrobori*' in the light of what he *understands* of the *crowd-psychological-situation*, he passes inductively from the comprehension appropriate to the coincidence of social and religious concerns to a theory of religion as an expression of the social".⁶ This causes him to lose sight of the fact that "behind the idea of 'collective consciousness' is not the truth of a thing but the truth of a lived-state and affective situation".⁷ This causes Durkheim to dissemble what it is that constitutes society: he conflates the phenomenology of what a society is with both its noumenon and its essence. In other words, he makes of it an abstraction. Jealous of the natural sciences, Durkheimian sociology is established as a closed sociology, "closed to biology, closed to psychology, closed to history, closed to comprehension".⁸ It arbitrarily isolates "social causes" from the totality of social life and banishes all particularity and all history. Society becomes reified, given its own reality in which there are no longer "societies" but only *the* society, which is thereby abstracted as a thing in itself with universal properties.

Although Monnerot's critique of Durkheimian sociology was published after he had left the Surrealist Group,⁹ it very much emerges out of his surrealist research and is consistent with reflec-

⁵ Monnerot, *Les faits sociaux ne sont pas des choses*, Paris, Gallimard, 1946, p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹ It might be argued that it is inappropriate to consider Monnerot within the context of surrealism. His bizarre political trajectory, which has led him towards the extreme right, makes him something of an embarrassment to surrealism. Yet although

tions by other surrealists on the question of methodology. So although it would be misleading to try to establish a specific “surrealist” methodological approach, we can still look for methodological approaches within surrealism to see whether they respond to any systematic criteria and to what extent such methodological approaches are of value in relation to anthropology.

Monnerot’s approach is guided by the concrete. This, above all, appears to be the starting point of all surrealist research. Abstract thought in itself, in accordance with its materialism, is alien to a surrealist view. Nicolas Calas has insisted on this point: “From concrete to concrete again, from matter to new materiality, such is the order that the artist’s thought must follow, if it is not to lose itself in vain abstractions”.¹⁰ From this perspective, Calas rejects anything that begins from a metaphysical, artistic or ethical standpoint. As examples of such a false methodological approach, he cites the psychoanalytic research of Adler and Jung, the first of which is faulty because Adler begins with a social framework, the second because Jung begins with a metaphysical one. They represent two poles of a fundamental methodological error. Adler displaces psychic mechanisms to the realm of the social, while Jung displaces social mechanisms to the realm of the psychic. In so doing both establish, like Durkheim, an abstract point of departure which cannot be questioned in its own terms. On the other hand, Calas sees Freud as an exemplary figure in that he establishes his psychoanalytic theory entirely in the concrete, recognising his own position in relation to the subject of study.¹¹ At this point Calas’s critique of Adler and Jung is remarkably similar to Monnerot’s of Durkheim: both

he was to some degree writing from outside surrealism in the forties, it seems to me that his work in the forties is still fully within the surrealist tradition. He did, in fact, take part in the major surrealist exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and, within the terms of reference taken by this study, I feel it is essential to consider his books from this period, which are all major works, as being fully within the orbit of surrealist criticism.

¹⁰ Calas, *Confound the Wise*, New York, Arrow Editions, 1942, p. 107. Although Calas uses the word “artist” here, it is clear that he means any form of research.

¹¹ One might note that though Freud was dogmatic in asserting how crucial the idea of infantile sexuality or concepts such as the Oedipus Complex or the Primal Horde are for psychoanalysis, these are concepts that, no matter how much they may be open to question, emerge from within the data and can be questioned

Travel, Surrealism and the Science of Mankind

Calas and Monnerot see the error as being to reduce social or psychic phenomena to abstractions. The aim is always to engage with the concrete—a concern that one finds again and again in surrealist writing.

To be based on concrete reality, according to Calas, it is necessary that the researcher must recognise his own subjectivity in relation to the material and also recognise the essential subjectivity of any theory emerging out of the research. To understand a theory we must recognise that our intent is always pre-eminent: no experiment can ever prove the correctness of a theory since, by its very nature, an experiment can only work within the frame of the terms of reference we place upon it. An experiment cannot then show the correctness of a theory, but can be judged only within the terms of reference so established to be either a success or failure. We need nevertheless to remain conscious of the framework we are establishing. In recognising the subjective element in research, though, Calas still does not argue for the subjectivity of the result of such research. To the contrary, like most surrealists, he seems to see a collapse into subjectivity as the enemy. But the trap of subjectivity is only revealed in relation to the false assumption of objectivity. Objectivity is always possible providing one is clear about one's own frame of reference, which is always subjectively established. The great danger is to believe that objectivity can be established in absolute terms and have reference beyond the confines of the particular argument. René Al-leau expressed the surrealist understanding on this point with great clarity: "All human sciences are subjective and it is the lucid and sincere recognition of that basic subjectivity that determines the degree of relative objectivity they can attain".¹²

The first task for the experimenter, then, is context: "I believe we cannot study a phenomenon such as art without situating it in relation to causes and effects, that is to say as a process".¹³

within the methodological framework that Freud himself sets up. That is, his concepts are not imposed upon it from without, whereas with Adler and Jung social and metaphysical ideas are assumed from without and cannot be challenged within the material itself.

¹² Quoted in Thirion, *Revolutionaries Without Revolution*, London, Cassell, 1978, p. 483.

¹³ Calas, *Confound the Wise*, p. 5.

As such the two essential factors in criticism are first to situate the object in historical context and then to “make an evaluation according to the poetic needs of the present”.¹⁴ In working with concrete reality the aim must always be, according to Calas, to “materialize the dream”. It is this aim that seems above all to motivate surrealist criticism and present us with one of the determinants for the evaluation of research. An affective relation to the material must be established. Breton put the issue in these terms: “Criticism must be a matter of love”.

In a like manner, Roger Caillois considered the question of classification to advance a notion of “diagonal science” which seems significant from a surrealist point of view. Caillois took issue with specialization in the sciences and in particular with the way in which systematization was used as a modular justification for such classification. He notes that all classification distorts. It corresponds to no recognisable reality and is no more than a methodological tool for coming to terms with the multiplicity of being. For instance, he notes, general classification tells us that bats are not birds, but flying mammals. However, such classification requires the separation of the component parts of different creatures, giving a greater importance to certain features, here the metabolism. If, however, the wings were to be taken as the loci from which the classification was taken (as is *de facto* the case if one studies the mechanics of flight), then one would have to classify bats with birds.¹⁵ He goes on: “Nature is one; its laws are everywhere the same or correspond to each other and are united and coherent in the different kingdoms and to different degrees. Each science explores a part of the whole, bringing together a collection of phenomena and given characteristics, of individuals or of reactions which bring out similar or parallel properties. But the limits that determine these collections, without being arbitrary, are often deceptive and in any case have been determined with the aid of criteria which, while they might be the best available, necessarily exclude others”.¹⁶ As with Monnerot and Ca-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁵ This argument clearly has something in common with the one advanced by Foucault in *Les Mots et les choses*, although Caillois, unlike Foucault, does not suggest that classification is thus arbitrary.

¹⁶ Caillois, *Cases d'un échiquier*. Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 54.

las, then, Caillois is above all sensitive to the context of research and the fact that it needs to be concretized within its own terms of reference.

In its beginnings surrealism based itself on a concept of automatism that could be seen as a methodological technique. Automatism aims to explore the play of disinterested thought. Confronting thought in its “pure state”, it proposes to express “the actual functioning of thought”. Probably nothing in surrealism has been so misunderstood as automatism, which was conceived neither as a technique for the production of texts, nor as a means to explore some kind of essential reality. Rather it was a means to put oneself in touch with the inner resources of one’s own being. As such it has something in common with eastern meditation techniques. To my mind Roger Caillois has best expressed the “automatist attitude” in writing of his relation to stones, which he regards “at times [as] objects of contemplation, almost as support of spiritual exercise. [...] Like the ancient Chinese, I am drawn to consider each stone as a world. Like Pascal, I presume that, from the atom to the nebulae, the models of two infinities coincide and, like Paracelsus, I readily accept that things establish their own sorts of signatures which are at once diverse and constant”.¹⁷ As such automatism can be seen as offering a means to establish a direct relation with the object contemplated. This was what Breton saw as fundamental, in distinguishing automatism from the spiritualist concept of automatism: “contrary to what spiritualism proposes—that is the dissociation of the subject’s psychological personality—surrealism proposes nothing less than the *unification* of that personality”.¹⁸

Automatism also connects up with another key surrealist idea—that of objective chance, which is based on the belief that there is a continuity and a coincidence between the natural world and our own experience of it. Through the workings of objective chance is revealed the unexpected correspondence between material and mental facts. The idea itself was taken from Hegel, as the dual process whereby necessity manifests itself as chance,

¹⁷ Caillois, *Pierres réfléchies*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 9.

¹⁸ Breton, “The Automatic Message”, in F. Rosemont (ed.), *What is Surrealism?*, London, Pluto Press, 1978, p. 105.

and *vice versa*. Subjectivity and objectivity thus meet as a sign of recognition of the basic harmony between man's desires and the natural flow of the world. Objective chance is thus the most affirmative of all surrealist ideas, which is posited on the belief that the world offers everything to someone who has confidence in it.

Objective chance is most obviously manifested in the surrealist object, which represents in itself the concretization of human desire in material form. It is noticeable that the object has been one of the most persistent art forms within surrealism, which has generated theoretical discussion that relates, obviously enough, to debates about objectivity.

THE CRISIS OF THE OBJECT IN SURREALISM

The idea of a crisis of the object was one of the central themes within surrealism during the thirties. In 1936 the surrealists organized an exhibition of objects in Paris and in a text in the accompanying catalogue, Breton addressed the question "Crise de l'objet". Breton saw that this crisis had been precipitated by the falling apart of rationalist and realist models for the representation of reality. "We are witnessing", he wrote, "the same vigorous stirrings of the thought process rebelling against the thinking habits of the past millennium heralding a way of thought which is no longer a reducing agent but has become infinitely inductive and extensible: one in which the object ceases to be fixed permanently on the nearer side of thought itself and re-creates itself on the further side as far as the eye can reach".¹⁹

The concern with the status of the object arises above all from the surrealist interest in Hegel. In Hegelian philosophy subject and object are seen as being problematic. They are not independent categories. They respond to each other, act upon each other and are inseparable from one another: the subject could only be viewed through the object while in the same way, the object could only be viewed through the subject. As the surrealists were well

¹⁹ Breton, "Crisis of the Object", in *Surrealism and Painting*, New York, Harper and Row, 1972, p. 271.

aware, to posit a “crisis of the object” was to imply at the same time a “crisis of the subject”. To bring the object into question was to challenge mankind’s relation with the external world. It was to bring to the fore the difficulty of fixing the object through the gaze of the subject, without which the object does not exist: “Nothing that surrounds us is object: all is subject”,²⁰ as Breton had written. At the same time, objectification was necessary for the self-realization of the object as subject. This accords with Hegel’s insistence on differentiation in subject and object relations and, in the anthropological context, points to the fact that the subject cannot be invested with a value in itself, but has to be mediated through its relation with the object. In this respect surrealism looks towards liberty as breaking the chains that tie the object and subject in an iniquitous relation. As Annie Le Brun explained: the object “allows the subject to rise above the folly of separation and invent itself by means of the union of two separate realities as a continued symbolic conjuration of rupture. Simply perceived, the object serves to mask emptiness by its neutral presence, or tends to be confounded with it, while the privileged object imposes its own presence on us as a touchstone of emptiness, serving to reveal, between internal psychic reality and external reality, a horizon in which the menace of separation is vanquished without being repressed, and thereby becomes a guarantee of the freedom to take risks”.²¹ The transformation from perception of the object in itself to its status as privileged object is effected by means of the image which holds subject and object in balance between separate realities. In such a way, surrealism challenges the inequality of the subject and object relation through the image that “confronts this inner representation with that of the concrete forms of the real world, seeks in turn [...] to seize the object in its generality, and as soon as it has succeeded in so doing, tries to take that supreme step which is the poetic step, *par excellence*: excluding (relatively) the external object as such and considering nature only in its relationship with the inner world of consciousness”.²²

²⁰ Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 35.

²¹ Annie Le Brun, “Objets d’identité”, in *A Distance*, Paris, Carrère, 1985, p. 42.

²² Breton, “Surrealist Situation of the Object”, in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1974, p. 260.

The first principle in surrealism, then, must always be objectification, since it is only through objectification that the nature of the object can be defined. But at the same time we need to remain conscious of the fact that the object we perceive does not correspond with anything more than, at best, a small part of the object's own integral being: "The object is the rock and the beach and as we think we have reached the heart of the rock, we find that the horizon of the beach still continues to unfold into the infinite. The object is never identical with itself and invites us to discover, one by one, the pieces of the symbolic functioning of the puzzle of our identity".²³

These Hegelian reflexions, which are at the heart of the surrealist approach towards the object, show how the aim is to both fix and disintegrate identity at the same time: that is to hold fixation and disintegration in a tension that never allows the fixity of the object to become an issue. As such the object ceases to be a thing in itself but becomes, as Jean-François Chabrun expressed it, "the conception of an economy of exchange between the I and the Universe".²⁴ The great value of the surrealist object is to establish a non-utilitarian relationship with matter. It destroys our privileged relation with objects which are thereby returned to their proper integrity. While from a rationalist point of view this means that they become out of control and a threat, for the surrealist this lack of control is not perceived as a problem. In such terms, knowledge has been defined in surrealist terms by René Crevel as "the eternal and infinite rapprochement of thought with its object".

Bearing these points in mind, let us next try to apply this specifically to anthropology in the way in which travel has been treated in surrealism.

TRAVEL, THE IMAGINATION AND THE EXOTIC

The problematic raised by the idea of travel in the contemporary world was forcibly brought home to the surrealist writer and an-

²³ Annie Le Brun, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

²⁴ Jean-François Chabrun, in Michel Fouré (ed.), *Histoire du Surréalisme sous l'occupation*, Paris, Table Ronde, 1982, p. 400.

thropologist Michel Leiris during the course of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition which crossed the centre of Africa during 1932/3. As Leiris witnesses in his journal *L'Afrique fantôme*,²⁵ his urge to travel had been to “lose his white habits”. But he had to recognise that this was a vain undertaking—the confrontation with the other he expected did not occur. The experience simply served to emphasise how deeply etched his own European sensibility was. He had to recognise that he could not escape from himself. The urge towards travel, which has become inscribed within our sensibility as the world has become easy of access through European expansion, frequently represents little more than the will to be elsewhere than one is. As such it remains primarily a negative experience, responding to a lack in the way we perceive our own social surroundings rather than a will to something new. In this respect the ancient notion of the journey tends to be lost—travel becomes simply a displacement in space: we remain passive observers as the world is transformed before our gaze.

Yet the image of the journey is so integral to the experience of human life and can even perhaps be said to be the most archetypal of all human images and at the heart of most mythologies. It is therefore hardly surprising that the idea of the journey is one of the first specifically human images that has come down to us from the origins of culture. The oldest written text known to us, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, represents a journey of some complexity dating from 3000 B.C. A similar account of a journey, the *Odyssey* of Homer, takes its place as a corner-stone of the Western cultural tradition.

Anthropology, as a Western intellectual discipline taking mankind as its field of study, established its lineage in direct relation to the travel narrative. It has not traced its origins back to Gilgamesh or Homer, though, but to Herodotus, for reasons that are pertinent to our discussion.

Herodotus was attractive as the founding father of anthropology less because of the verisimilitude of the representations that constitute the anthropological content of his work (it is arguable that there are as many outlandish things in Herodotus as in Homer) as in its form; Herodotus disengages us from the mythy-

²⁵ Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1934.

cal *form* of the journey to confront us directly with an image of otherness, which he claims to present with as much verity as possible. It is this claim, rather than anything directly in the content of his work, that establishes the credentials of Herodotus as anthropologist (and also as historian). The approach of Herodotus is descriptive of “other people”. He separates himself from them and comments on them. Unlike the “epic” or “romance” form, his approach allows him not to conflate his own perspective with that of the people he is writing about. Rather he seeks to establish the other’s integrity, positing the other as being different rather than, as in the epic form, an enemy or an obstacle to be overcome. In Herodotus alienness becomes objectified through difference instead of emerging pell-mell from the necessities of the narrative structure. We might exemplify this point by the episode of the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*. For Homer he is simply a dangerous obstacle to Odysseus in his journey and must be defeated to allow the hero to pass on his way—as such he has no integral reality except in relation to the hero of the narrative; Herodotus, on the other hand, had he encountered such a creature, would have sought to understand him quite independently on his relation to the story being told. This would seem to represent, at least at first glance, an admirably anthropological attitude and to draw a sharp distinction between the concerns of science and those of romance. It perhaps does do so, in fact, but not entirely in the way generally thought. For questions of objectivity are by no means as simple and straightforward as the claims of a positivist anthropology might like us to believe.

In her history of early anthropology, Margaret Hodgen has considered Herodotus as being an exemplary figure who established an anthropology *avant la lettre* which was to be distorted over the centuries to come: “It was his hand”, she writes, “which first set down in an organized and vivid form a description of a series of human cultures, later to be deformed and disfigured to suit the twisted imagination of his successors. It was his mind, brooding restlessly over strange cultural contrasts in Mediterranean lands, which first formulated some of the persisting problems of anthropological inquiry”.²⁶ Hodgen writes with great en-

²⁶ Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth*

thusiasm for the approach of Herodotus and seems to be incredulous at what she sees as the wilful distortions of the medieval mind.

In fact, Herodotus has often been considered to be too fanciful; and a “liar”. Was the reason for this some sort of incomprehensible perversity of medieval thinking, or does it rather involve a different perspective on the nature of the objective portrayal of the alien?

Of course, whether Herodotus’ intentions were “anthropological”, in the contemporary sense, is open to question. It is a hazardous matter to impute intent (especially within such a specific frame of reference) to a person whose culture and sensibility was so different from ours. It is misleading to try to establish a category (or discipline) of something like anthropology in so specific a framework as to make of it an absolute value applicable to all historical periods. Especially when anthropology, as consciously elaborated, properly belongs only to recent European history. The question of the status of Herodotus’ work in the context of Greek society is something for classical historians, rather than anthropologists, to determine. No doubt in considering Herodotus to be the originator of anthropology, we are imposing our own gloss. But what concerns us here is the nature of the evidence offered by Herodotus and how it helps to illuminate questions about travel and the nature of anthropological evidence.

At a superficial level it is not difficult to see that one of the central strands that unites Herodotus to modern anthropology is the need of colonialism. Greek political authority was expansionist and imperialist in nature and such authority must have “accurate” information about the peoples it has conquered to be able to maintain an efficient administration and impose its authority in the colonized territories. Even so, such “accurate” information still needs to be ideologically sifted and defined: it is never neutral.

For in truth the medieval mind was not “imperialist” in this sense at all and consequently its interest in other peoples was far more disinterested. Disinterested, but hardly more accurate. Yet accuracy in such a context begins to lose its sense. It is defined

Centuries, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 20/21.

relative to the requirements of the society from which one is working. Medieval accounts of travel may seem to us to be fanciful and almost devoid of reality and we tend to ascribe this to some form of descriptive deficiency. The fact is otherwise: medieval travel accounts responded with accuracy to what medieval society required from travel accounts.²⁷ To understand particular travel accounts it is not enough simply to establish a framework of supposed “objective” portrayal. What is necessary is to consider the whole question of the to-and-fro’ nature of the encounter with the alien in terms of what is perceived as familiar and “home”. Anthropological evidence always establishes its objectivity by means of balancing subjectivities. For this reason questions of imaginative construction must enter into the frame of anthropological enquiry.

In the journey, the perception of the alien is always set off against a conceptualization of the familiar. One state begins where the other ends, although the boundaries between them are never clear cut and are always in process of new mediation. We are always, at every moment, involved in mapping out a new terrain by which our concepts of the familiar and the alien, the domestic and the wild, home and abroad can be established. How we perceive other people and how we undertake specific journeys is always dependent upon the relative sense of mediation we have established between concepts of what is familiar and what is alien, concepts which are largely produced by the imagination. This is something that was particularly important to the late nineteenth-century writer, doctor, archaeologist and traveller, Victor Segalen.

Segalen denied the usual definition of exoticism as being a fixed form of strangeness that is assigned to particular races, cultures fauna, etc. Rather, the exotic is a sense of surprise in which a disjunction is apparent between oneself and the world in which

²⁷ On this question we might note the revealing example recounted by Jamake Highwater concerning an encounter between the Swiss artist Rudolph Friedrich Kurz and a Sioux Indian in 1852. The Indian expressed dissatisfaction with Kurz drawing and said that he could do better. The Indian drew a man on horseback in a way that both of the man’s legs could be seen. Kurz objected that this was wrong because one of the man’s legs could not be seen from the angle from which it was painted. “‘Ah’, the Sioux said softly, ‘but, you see, a man has *two* legs.’” (Highwater, *The Primal Mind*, New York, Harper & Row, 1981, p. 57.)

one lives. It is a feeling—the opposite of a *déjà-vu*—in which perception is torn apart from the familiar. It tends to occur in one of three ways—through a confrontation with the physically distinct, with the past or with the future. The exotic is a jolt into the unknown. But as it is established, so it tends to fade with assimilation and coming to terms with the new experience. The exotic is a means for the renewal of vision—it enriches the sensibility as it holds the real and imaginary in tension. Segalen's quest—which has to be considered as being very much an anthropological one—was to try to hold this tension so that internal and external reality would not be perceived as contradictory to each other. He wrote: "Let's not flatter ourselves that we can assimilate morals, races, nations, others, but rather let's rejoice in never being able to do so, thereby reserving to ourselves the durability of the pleasure of feeling the diverse".²⁸ What needs to be considered is the nature of the imagination as such. How does it function in relation to the real and produce the images encountered in representation?

In Segalen's book *Équipée* (1928) he explores the nature of travel in its double sense as both a journey out there and as a journey within. The subtitle of the work is "a journey to the land of the real" and it is written around a voyage that Segalen himself made in 1914 across China. The journey was undertaken primarily as an archaeological expedition to uncover examples of ancient Chinese statuary. Segalen was accompanied by Gilbert de Voisins and the photographer Jean Lartigue, and an account of the expedition was published in 1924 by the *Librarie Orientaliste* Paul Geuthner. But this very concrete reason for travelling was not sufficient for Segalen. He wanted to use it to try to understand the mechanism of the imagination through the process of travelling, to try to determine the extent to which one's preconceptions determined how one perceived what was encountered in the actual process of travel. Or did the physical act of travelling eliminate the preconceptions built up whilst thinking about the journey beforehand? The central issue addressed in *Équipée* therefore concerns the functioning of the process of the imagination in relation to directly experienced life. It was a ques-

²⁸ Victor Segalen, *Notes sur l'Exotisme*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1978, p. 25.

tion of considering whether “the imaginary [is] dissipated or replenished when confronted with the real”.²⁹ As Yvonne Hieuh says: “The ultimate goal is to settle the following question: do the worlds of the Real and the Imaginary unite and reinforce each other, or does one inevitably destroy the other, so that returning from this ‘*Équipée dans le Réel*’, the author will have to give up the ‘*double jeu plein de promesse sans quoi l’homme vivant n’est plus corps, ou n’est plus esprit*?’”.³⁰

Segalen had a background in symbolism, in which the idea of travel was often scorned in a cult of the artificial. The classic example of this is the chapter in Huysmans’ *A Rebours* in which the central character, Des Esseintes, having decided to visit London, wanders around Paris for anything imbued with English atmosphere—he buys a map, visits tea-shops and English bars, mixes with English people, etc. On his way to the railway station to catch the train, however, he decides he has had enough of London: “After all, I have felt and seen what I wanted to feel and see. I have been steeped in English life ever since I left home; it would be a fool’s trick to go and lose these imperishable impressions by a clumsy change of locality. Why, surely I must have been out of my senses to have tried thus to repudiate my old settled convictions, to have condemned the obedient figment of my imagination, to have believed like the veriest ninny in the necessity, the interest, the advantage of a trip abroad?”.³¹

Although coming from the same background, Segalen had none of this aristocratic contempt for the physical reality of the journey itself. On the contrary, he travelled as much as he could. But his symbolist background gave him an acute sensitivity to the inner component involved when one travels in (outer) reality, and

²⁹ Victor Segalen, *Équipée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983, p. 11.

³⁰ Yvonne Y. Hsieh, *Victor Segalen’s Literary Encounter With China: Chinese Moulds, Western Thoughts*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988, p. 124.

³¹ J.K. Huysmans, *Against the Grain*, (1946) [translated by John Howard] London, Fortune Press, p. 136. The symbolists should perhaps be distinguished from the surrealists in this respect, for although the surrealists appear to have been largely indifferent or had a rather ironical attitude toward the idea of travelling, they never had any of the active contempt for travel displayed by the symbolists. This is an important distinguishing feature, for ultimately symbolism retreats before the exigencies of the real world into an inner sanctum of the imagination, whereas surrealism always sought to hold imagination and reality in tension.

the extent to which the two are dependent on each other. He could not accept the fact that a journey simply involved the physical transportation of a person from one environment to another. He begins *Équipée* with these words: “I have always held to be suspect or illusory everything within the genre of adventure tales, travelogues, and tattletales—decked out with sincere words—based on activity presented as occurring in specific places at the end of catalogued days”.³² In this his attitude prefigures that of surrealism.

ELEMENTS OF A SURREALIST ETHNOGRAPHY

In surveying the topics on which the surrealists have written, one is often astonished by their range. One subject which is noticeably absent, and which seems all the more surprising in that it has proved to be one of the most important genres of twentieth-century literature, is travel. It is noticeable, for instance, that though three of Breton's books, *L'Amour fou* (1938), *Martinique, Charmeuse de Serpents* (1942) and *Arcane 17* (1947) are centred around journeys made respectively to the Canary Islands, Martinique and Canada, one would find in them only the barest of impressions of the lands through which he travelled. His concern with any documentary evidence is almost nil, and what little there is seems devoted to the fauna and flora of the land. Even the various autobiographies written by surrealists hardly ever seem to dwell on journeys made and in a book by Raymond Queneau with the promising title *Le Voyage en Grèce*, which collects together articles from a time when he did indeed make a journey to Greece, the only reference we actually find to Greece is in the form of a questionnaire: “*Qu'attendiez-vous de la Grèce? Je n'en attendais rien. J'en suis revenu autre*”.³³

In fact the surrealists as a whole seem to have had something of a marked distrust of travel. This was certainly true of Breton. Elisa Breton told me that though she herself had a great love of travel, for Breton it was little more than a great inconvenience: he did his travelling, she felt, through his collection of art ob-

³² Segalen, *Équipée*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³³ Raymond Queneau, *Le Voyage en Grèce*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 55.

jects. Likewise René Magritte's rather contemptuously ironic attitude towards travel is well documented in his correspondence: "I'm completely devoid of the kind of imagination one needs to 'set off' on a trip", he wrote to André Bosmans.³⁴ And again: "Wherever I go, I say to myself 'It's just like I imagined it would be. I thought so'".³⁵ In a similar sort of vein, Marcel Mariën says that when he came to London, he used a map of Paris to find his way around.

I mentioned to Vincent Bounoure that there seemed to be this dislike of travel in surrealist circles and although he said he had not really perceived that himself, for his own part he had never had any interest in travelling even though he is one of the leading French experts on Polynesian art and culture. His attitude was that such artifacts were the evidence of the society he loved but which did not exist any longer "on the ground" and thus there was no point in going there.

One can cite other cases: Paul Eluard made a legendary trip to the South Seas in 1925, having left without a moment's notice and remained in the Orient for 9 months, but never said anything about the voyage, which appears to have left no mark on his writing, while it remains something of a mystery what he actually did there. Luis Buñuel has stated: "I've never travelled for pleasure. This taste for tourism, so prevalent these days, is incomprehensible to me. I don't have the least curiosity about countries where I've never been and never will go".³⁶ A dislike of tourism is also apparent in several of their collective declarations, most strongly expressed in "Murderous Humanitarianism" published in Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology* in 1934, in which, having castigated those "drawn to some 'mystic' Orient or other" and the "votaries of corpses and theosophies [who] go to ground in the past, vanish down the warrens of Himalayan monasteries", goes on to pour scorn on "our romantic exoticism and modern travel lust".

There are nonetheless some accounts of journeys in surrealist writings and to cast an eye over some of these works hopefully

³⁴ Letter of 26 May, 1958.

³⁵ Letter to Guy Mertens, April 1965.

³⁶ Luis Buñuel, *Mon Dernier soupir*, Paris, Laffont, 1982, p. 167.

will be to gain a perspective on the way surrealists have approached the question of travel and the encounter with other cultures in a context of relevance to anthropology. Whether these can be classed as “ethnography” or not they certainly go beyond what we usually consider to be mere travel literature. None are concerned with the individual’s own subjective impressions of the country that are characteristic of modern travel writing. All seek a form of “participation” within the culture, although it is on terms that are very different from those associated with the concepts of anthropological fieldwork.

The most significant of these works is certainly Michel Leiris’s monumental *L’Afrique fantôme*, which we have already mentioned and which has become very important in recent years as a precursor of the fashionable genre of “reflexive anthropology”. For James Clifford, for instance, Leiris has led the way to an ethnography based on a “writing process that will endlessly pose and recompose an identity”.³⁷ He says of *L’Afrique fantôme*, that by “interrupting the smooth ethnographic story of an access to Africa, it undermines the assumption that self and other can be gathered to a stable narrative coherence”.³⁸ Clifford then goes on to argue that this represents a “surrealist ethnography”, based upon techniques of collage and juxtaposition and arbitrarily establishing “meaning” by shuffling reality as one would a deck of cards. From our exploration of methodological questions above, there seems little doubt that such an aim would be thoroughly out of accord with surrealist intentions. Since we would agree with Clifford that Leiris’s achievement in *L’Afrique fantôme* is certainly in accord with surrealism, then we need to consider the nature of the work and its relation to surrealism in the context in which it was written.

L’Afrique fantôme is an account of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, which was one of the most important events in the history of French ethnography. Leiris had gone on the expedition purely by chance. He had become interested in anthropology and had begun attending Marcel Mauss’s lectures along with Georges Bataille, but apparently he had no intention of making anthro-

³⁷ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

pology a career. Nor did he seem to have any particular interest in Africa as such.

In fact, considered purely as ethnography, *L'Afrique fantôme* must be regarded as a complete failure. Although it does set down some tantalizing ethnographic details, these are completely uncontextualized as such and one can gain no real sense of the various societies through which the mission passed. There is no consistency to the data to which we are given access, which we see only through the eyes of Leiris. Of some events we are given minute details, of others hardly anything. We are entirely dependent, not simply on what Leiris personally saw and did, but on whatever his mood happened to be at the particular time and on the particular day on which he made the entry. The best that can be said for such an approach, considered as the ethnography of another society, is that it is outrageously irresponsible. But can *L'Afrique fantôme* be considered ethnography in the usually accepted sense of the word?

Prior to going on the mission, Leiris had done little study of ethnography and had apparently not given any thought to the idea of becoming an anthropologist. Any interest he had in Africa itself appears to have been as a result of Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*, an outrageously extravagant account of life in Africa that quite consciously draws a completely "imaginary" Africa that has no verisimilitude at all with the actual continent. As his notes reveal, Leiris was uncomfortable, not to say hostile, to being placed in the role of an anthropologist. It was not until after he had returned, and indeed after *L'Afrique fantôme* had been published, that he decided to train as an anthropologist. As he embarked on this career, his own anthropological writings are relatively conventional and certainly take none of the liberties, in terms of subjective positioning, that *L'Afrique fantôme* does. As regards his own position within the anthropological discipline, Leiris does not seem to have ever considered himself as an innovative anthropologist. Indeed most of his work gives the impression of being a little distracted, the work of someone doing a job that interests him but whose own personal interests are elsewhere. This is borne out by his comments in recent interviews,³⁹

³⁹ See interview with Jean Jamin and Sally Price in *Gradhiva*, 1980, no. 4.

in which he rather dismisses anthropology. It would be more accurate, for this point of view, to see Leiris primarily as a poet who became involved with anthropology and whose most immediate interests lay elsewhere.

In this respect, *L'Afrique fantôme* can be seen as something of a prolegomena, not to his anthropological career, but to his vast autobiographical project which, although it has often been seen as representing—much to Leiris's own annoyance—an “ethnography of the self”—in fact has little to do with any conventional anthropological approach.

Leiris himself seems somewhat ambivalent about the place to assign the work within his *oeuvre*. Making a clear distinction between his “anthropology” and his “literature”, he does place *L'Afrique fantôme* in the anthropology section (although this could in fact have been for professional reasons—to make it seem he had written more anthropology than he had) but still has doubts about whether it is ethnography.⁴⁰ Perhaps it would be more accurately described as “testimony” than as “ethnography”, since what it effectively does is to bear witness, with exemplary candour, to what happened to a group of Europeans who travelled for twenty-one months through the centre of Africa. As such it certainly has an exemplary value, but it does not bring into question the traditional ethnographic approach, nor does it establish a role model for an innovatory form of ethnography. Indeed, implicit in *L'Afrique fantôme* is a critique of any role model. Leiris has stated that he had a “repugnance for everything that is a transposition or arrangement, in other words a fallacious compromise between real facts and the pure products of the imagination”.⁴¹ *L'Afrique fantôme* bears witness to this repugnance and to the continuity of the book with his surrealist concerns. There can be little doubt that *L'Afrique fantôme* is a surrealist work, but not for the reasons Clifford gives, since surrealism is a moral attitude and not a technique. It is therefore not the collage technique, the use of metonymic juxtaposition, the mockery of scientific discourse, the taste for incongruity, that make the work surrealist, even if these things are apparent within the

⁴⁰ Interview in *Gradhiva*, p. 42.

⁴¹ Leiris, *Manhood*, London, Cape, 1968.

book. In surrealism it is simply false to say, as Clifford does, that procedures of cutting out and assemblage are the message and that surrealists would find anything to praise in such an anthropology. But having said all this and denied the status of *L'Afrique fantôme* as ethnography, whether in the traditional mode or in that of the currently fashionable reflexive, we will now seek to turn our argument back on itself and argue that *L'Afrique fantôme* is indeed ethnography, even innovatory ethnography, not because of either its form or its reflexive matter but because of its content.

In *L'Afrique fantôme* what we see is the displacement of the object of ethnographic study; Leiris is not studying the peoples encountered by the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, nor is he studying his fellow ethnographers, as Michel Izard has suggested, since his observations on them are no more systematic than those on the natives. What is treated systematically as an object is the internal dynamic of Leiris's own imaginative processes. It does not seem to me that this can be described as an "ethnography of the self", since Leiris himself is not really the focus of the "study" (if this is an appropriate word). Rather it is the dialectic interplay between Leiris's self and his perception of the external world that is addressed. Internal and external, in this context, become inseparable. Can we speak of such a process as representing an "ethnography of the imagination"?

Three clear literary influences play upon Leiris's intentions with regard to the writing of *L'Afrique fantôme*. Most immediate is Breton's *Nadja* (1927), in which real and imaginary events are presented with the same veracity and given an identical ontological value. The other two works are Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. The influence of these two works is perhaps less pervasive and immediate (and Leiris's intentions may have been rather different from these two authors), but if we consider the book in relation to these two works we gain some insight into the background against which Leiris was working. The importance of Proust is in the meticulous way in which he sought to address the question of memory while Joyce was important again for the way the events of a single day are presented so meticulously as to suggest numerous levels of possible interpretation. In some ways it might be possible to argue that both

Proust and Joyce were engaged in an ethnographic quest, a quest in which the “object” is not other people but the mechanism of one’s own imagination. In this respect both works, in the way in which they effectively “mythologize” contemporary life, have something in common with surrealist intentions, even though the surrealists were generally fond of neither author because of what was perceived as the overly literary intent. Even so the tantalizing glimpses of a potential “ethnographic” approach to the imagination, something that is rather characteristic of surrealist narrative strategies in general, is in many ways prefigured in Proust and Joyce, and takes particular form in Leiris’s autobiographical project.

If Leiris’s account of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition raises difficulties as to the status of its ethnographic import within anthropology, Antonin Artaud’s writings on Mexico and most notably his journey to the Tarahumara Indians—even though Artaud was not an anthropologist and had no interest in anthropological theory—are more clearly ethnographic in their overall aims in that Artaud was concerned to describe his experience in Mexico, and had no interest in problematizing his relation to the collection of ethnographic data. Artaud’s work does nevertheless raise equally difficult questions in other respects.

There are some parallels between Artaud’s journey to Mexico and the Dakar-Djibouti expedition in that Artaud had also hoped to be able to establish a similar sort of expedition among the Indian populations. The parallel, however, ends there. While the Griaule mission was primarily given the task of documenting the cultures encountered in the course of the journey, and also of bringing back as many cultural exhibits as possible, Artaud’s intention was “to do with discovering and reviving the vestiges of the ancient Solar culture”.⁴² Where the Dakar-Djibouti expedition was supported by the French government, Artaud had been invited to Mexico by some Mexicans interested in surrealism and had to raise his own funds, which were mostly obtained from friends, supplemented by the giving of lectures when he was ac-

⁴² Letter to Jean-Louis Barrault dated 10 July, 1936 in *Oeuvres Complètes*, tome 8, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 366.

tually in Mexico. He was given a grant by the Mexican government to visit the land of the Tarahumaras.

Artaud visited Mexico in 1936, staying there from January until October. His attitude towards his visit was nothing if not grandiose. Believing that the rest of the world had collapsed into barbarism, and considering that Mexico alone held the flame of world regeneration, Artaud believed he could work with the Mexicans towards the recovery of essential reality by rejecting pernicious European influences and reconciling Mexican revolutionary consciousness with the ancient secrets still retained by Indian civilization.

It should be recalled that at the time Mexico was governed by the progressive Cardenas administration, which was determined to build upon the achievements of the Mexican Revolution and was far from being unsympathetic to ideas like those of Artaud. It was indeed a government grant that allowed Artaud to visit the Tarahumaras, even though in the end he was unable to establish the expedition he wished and had to travel alone.

Artaud's ethnographic attitude is the polar opposite to that of anthropology. Where anthropology seeks to discover and comprehend an "Other", Artaud refuses to accept the notion of alienness. He refuses to accept the validity of treating other societies in terms other than his own. One could say that his image of the Tarahumaras was pre-determined, although this would be something of an over-simplification. It would be truer to say that he knew what he wanted to find in Mexico. It would be up to the Mexicans to conform to this idea. If they did not, then Artaud would reject them. Now, in considering the issue in these terms, what is apparent is that to some extent such an attitude is implicit in any ethnographic approach. Artaud's attitude problematizes any conception of "ethnocentrism", or rather brings into relief the fact that the ethnographer must bring some preconceptions into the field. The fact that Artaud's practice does not admit of the validity of denying such preconceptions does not necessarily invalidate his approach as ethnography, especially since the limit within which he is working is much narrower than that of most ethnographers. At the same time he makes no attempt to hide his own preconceptions and therefore one might argue that his ethnographic approach has some exemplary qualities in rela-

tion to the approach of traditional ethnography, since such an approach always leaves us to try to draw out what the anthropologist's own prejudices are, whereas there can be no doubt about Artaud's.

Artaud's attitude is very much a surrealist one, the assumption being that "thought is ONE and indivisible". This stance does not admit of the possibility of relativism. It is fundamentally monist and against any form of pluralism. And, thought being common to all, the distance and detachment formally demanded by anthropology is denied. Since everything comes from the same source, since everything is connected with everything else, then there is no possibility of alienness: everything becomes a matter of positioning. There is no question of "objectivity" as such, but of establishing the objective relation between different subjectivities. From an anthropological point of view, Artaud's image of the Tarahumaras can be dismissed as being inaccurate, but it is so only because anthropology does not accept the starting point with which Artaud began. What Artaud saw of Tarahumaras culture is as objective as any anthropological account; if it is invalid from the point of view of the anthropologist it is so because the anthropologist is looking for something else. This argument brings to mind the Freeman/Mead debate, where it can be seen that neither Freeman nor Mead present an objective view of Samoan reality, but one which reflects their own perspective on it.

Artaud's approach towards foreign culture contrasts interestingly with that of Leiris. At root both had a similar attitude and Leiris had gone on the Dakar-Djibouti expedition to "get rid of old European attitudes". He expected to find in Africa something analogous to what Artaud wanted in Mexico, but was constantly frustrated. Was Artaud more tenacious? Was it because the Tarahumaras, unlike the peoples Leiris encountered, were to a large degree unacculturated? Was it because Leiris was a more reflective individual who was responsive to the nuances of the other's society and perceived the disparity between what he hoped to find and what he actually did find? There is probably an element of truth in all three, but the fact that the Tarahumaras were an isolated tribe with little contact with the outside world, meant that Artaud was able to establish a more immediate relation with

the indigenous peoples than Leiris, who was part of a group of Europeans travelling among peoples who were in large degree colonial subjects and used to dealing with Europeans.⁴³

A different perspective can be gained from a consideration of Octavio Paz's *The Monkey Grammarian* (1971). Paz gives us no details about the circumstances of his journey to the Indian holy city of Galta. He wrote the text of the book in the summer of 1970 in Cambridge, where he held the chair of Latin American studies for a year. He had visited Galta when he was in India as the Mexican ambassador to that country, a post he resigned in July 1968 in protest at the massacre of students in Mexico City. There was therefore at least a two-year gap between his visit and the writing up of the account. Paz never allows us to forget this triple conjunction: a Mexican, writing about a visit to an Indian town in the quiet seclusion of Cambridge University.

Galta is a town in Gujarat which was abandoned around 1920 because of encroachment by the desert. Falling into ruin it soon became a refuge for pariahs, holy men and, last but not least, monkeys. It also became a place of pilgrimage. Paz takes these images: a ruined city, untouchables, pilgrims, holy men and monkeys, as a point of departure for multiple reflexions on the nature of reality and the signification of perceptions of fixity and movement, turbulence and equilibrium, language and representation, fullness and emptiness. Thematic unity is established by the figure of Hanuman, the ambivalent Hindu monkey god who presides over culture and language.

At first glance, *The Monkey Grammarian* is even more disordered than either Leiris's or Artaud's books. Paz's narrative flies off in all directions at once, one perception being a touchstone for a whole series of reflexions. Such apparent confusion is illusory and as soon as one starts to engage with the book one comes to terms with its internal unity.⁴⁴

Paz challenges the whole concept of writing about travel. For him, to write an account of a journey is to erase the journey.

⁴³ Lourdes Andrade told me that the particular Tarahumaras tribe with which Artaud stayed has remained completely isolated to this day and that Artaud has been the only European they have allowed to live among them. Two anthropologists who tried to study them were murdered. I have not been able to verify this.

⁴⁴ *The Monkey Grammarian*, New York, Seaver, 1981, is clearly influenced by

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It is thus only vanity to seek to “represent” what one has seen. And unhealthy to try (this is also the theme of another surrealist travel narrative, Alberto Savinio’s *Speaking to Clio*, which is founded on the idea of writing as a process of clearing away past thought—a process of exorcism, even. Savinio goes so far as to recommend keeping a diary for the purpose of wiping the slate clean of the previous day—life is to be re-made anew each day). The purpose of writing is even precisely this: to wipe memories away and establish a new meaning in the new journey. Paz refuses to privilege any type of journey, whether it be a physical journey, or one conducted through reading or writing. The journey he undertakes from his study in Cambridge has as much significance as the one to Galta. Both represented the desire to continue the journey towards the self and towards the world. As such it represents the objective form of knowledge that surrealism sought, in which the subjective perspective would be incorporated within it and desire would become concretized. Breton had written that the universe is “an indivisible cryptogram which man is called upon to decipher” and this, we might say, provides the cornerstone for the surrealist “anthropological” approach. Nothing is ever “represented”; it is only re-made in a different form responding to different contingencies. The world, being one, cannot be experienced as separable from this whole. It is for this reason that Paz gives such significance to the figure of Hanuman, the grammarian who preceded mankind. As such he symbolizes the unity of man with nature.

We can see here the point at which the approaches of Leiris, Artaud and Paz converge: in the wish to decipher the universe. Within these terms the fundamental framework of the ethnographic encounter—of trying to understand the other—is renounced. All three decline, or more often ignore, the idea of trying to establish a distance between oneself and the object of study. They all refuse to detach themselves from the people they are visiting and insist on considering both as parts of the same reality while still respecting the problematic this establishes: they remain

Tristes Tropiques, with which it has much in common. Paz has written a book on Lévi-Strauss and has clearly learned a great deal about anthropology from him, although his philosophical position is somewhat different.

conscious—often acutely so—of themselves as different from those they travel amongst (at least this is true of Leiris and Paz, but is less so of Artaud). The anthropologist is supposed to dissolve his own prejudices, but Leiris, Artaud and Paz all accept their own tendentiousness. But it can, I think, be seen that their approaches can not be considered to be subjective. On the contrary, within the terms of the framework established, they all seek to establish an objectivity in relation to their own work. But they also point to areas of subjective intent, of imaginative construction, of factors of desire, that traditionally in anthropology have been excluded from the calculations upon which the ethnographic attitude is founded.

In each case, however, it is not the people visited who are the objects of study. In Paz's account, in particular, we gain no insight into the people who live at Galta. As an ethnography of Galta and its people, it would be worthless. As Paz states, nothing actually happened there. Although he describes a trip to an exotic place, Paz in fact refuses this exoticism and inscribes the very ordinariness that it involved, but only to emphasise the way in which any journey, any encounter, is at root mysterious. To a lesser extent, one could say the same about all the other accounts we have considered. Neither Leiris nor Artaud really make more than perfunctory attempts to understand the societies they visited. Such understanding as they had came from the extent to which they felt integrated into the society. They did not travel to try to find something new, something exotic and foreign, although to some extent they were looking for something that had been lost within themselves and their own society. In this respect they have something in common with other travellers in search of the "Noble Savage". I don't, however, see that this is the primary importance of these works in the anthropological perspective. Rather it is the extent to which they confront, in different ways, the encounter with otherness through their own individual imaginations.

The key surrealist image for the idea of travel is the phrase, *As he crossed the bridge the phantoms came to meet him*, something that comes from a film in which the lead character crosses a bridge into a dark forest. In the film the scene that follows the crossing of the bridge is printed in negative, suggesting the di-

alectical encounter with otherness in terms of a turning upside down of values.⁴⁵ It is perhaps in the surrealist attitude towards the cinema that we can gain another perspective onto ethnography through surrealism. The surrealists saw the visit to the cinema as always involving the crossing of a threshold into something unknown. Breton expressed this as follows: “It is a question of *going beyond* the bounds of what is ‘allowed’, which in the cinema as nowhere else, prepares me to enter into the ‘forbidden’”.⁴⁶ The effect is such that “a *super-disorientation* is to be expected here, not from the transference of a normal act from everyday life to a place consecrated to *another* life, which is profane, but between the ‘lesson’ the film teaches and the manner in which the person receiving it disposes of it”.⁴⁷

The question of the inter-relation between internal and external reality in the process of travel and the way in which we perceive other people and the quality of alienness is a central contemporary issue. In today’s world, in which travel has become a comparative formality, we need to question in what exactly the idea consists. As Sidney Mintz has said: “In its savage and repeated thrusts into the world outside, the West has gone very far in replacing difference with sameness, in supplanting other, contrasting modes of thought and act, in changing what had been exotic for Westerners into pale and tawdry reflexions of itself”.⁴⁸ As we have argued, travel has become a sort of empty status symbol in which the idea of otherness loses its meaning. For, as Mintz continues: “It may be that the day when the total history of European hegemony is finally written, the indictment that we made many societies resemble ours will count as heavily as that we destroyed many others altogether”.⁴⁹ From this perspective, we

⁴⁵ The film is F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1923), the first film version of *Dracula*. The image is an inter-title which does not in fact appear in the original version of the film, being a mis-translation that occurred when the inter-title was rendered into French. The scene itself is when Hutter leaves the common road to take the path to Dracula’s castle.

⁴⁶ Breton, “As in a Wood”, in Paul Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and its Shadow*, London, BFI, 1978, p. 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁸ Sidney W. Mintz, preface to the second edition of *Voodoo in Haiti* by Alfred Métraux, Cambridge, Mass., Schocken, 1972, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

need to question ourselves and to enquire into the way in which our conceptualization of others has been formulated according to our own needs. It is not enough, to quote Mintz again, to be “alternately amused and enraged by the consequences”. What ought to be challenged is the ground upon which we thought to impose our presence on other people, something which arises from the assumption that perceptual realism is the only ground for the basis of ontology. The surrealist Jean-Louis Bédouin, writing about Segalen in 1963, decried what he called the “sad esperanto” of contemporary language and communication, and went on: “true communication, fruitful exchanges, a profound understanding of Nature and of living beings are directly a function of the differences and distances existing between things in the intelligible, tangible universe and of the faculty granted to us to perceive and experience them. For it is these differences and distances that lay the foundation for the innumerable forms of *relationships* and make possible, for that very reason, the life of the spirit”.⁵⁰ And we should also remind ourselves, in the process, of the part that our own imaginative process plays in the way in which communication takes place. We should be aware of the way in which reality shifts as we enter into it. As Segalen wrote: “I have called real only what is Palpable... I hasten towards an other Real”.⁵¹

Michael Richardson
(*School of Oriental and African Studies, London*)

⁵⁰ Jean-Louis Bédouin, *Segalen*, Paris, Seghers, 1962, p. 11.

⁵¹ Victor Segalen, *Équipée*, p. 145.